



## CONCIERGE

# The ticket to well-planned trips

When it comes to making travel plans, many people are quick to turn to the Internet. Just a couple of clicks and your e-ticket purchase is done. However, travel agencies have found that by expanding their services they are able to compete with online offerings. And a computer, of course, can't replace personalized service and experienced advice.

For example, **All Ways Travel** proprietor Leigh Rylander-Klein's clients enjoy planning their trips in the intimate setting of her living room.

"I take a big interest in helping people take the best vacation they can. I offer concierge service and the ability to fix problems as they arise," she says. That's not something an online booking can take care of, she adds. "There have been so many times people have made plans on the Internet and then called me to fix their mistakes." However, her hands are tied in such situations.

Word of mouth has kept All Ways Travel in business for twenty-three years. "People with more intricate plans are still calling travel agents," Rylander-Klein observes. "When it comes to picking out premier inns or getting the best price on cruises, there are people who want a professional like myself to manage things for them."

All Ways Travel's full-service offerings include booking accommodations locally and setting up sailing charters



ILLUSTRATION BY KELLY MADDEN

with a sister company. "Not only do I send people all over the world, I welcome them here," Rylander-Klein adds. "I know my own back yard." Her referral program deals with clients all over the United States. She also focuses on international corporate travel and is a cruise and tour specialist. 9297 Kincaid Court, Sanibel; 239/472-3171 or 800/457-4250; fax 239/472-3173; e-mail Leigh.allwaystravel@wspan.com

**Geraci Travel Agency** owner Bill Lawton says his company is updating its Web site in order to compete. "We have e-specials we send out to people who sign up, things like extra special deals that come in so close to date we can't get it out by mail. So, if you can't beat 'em, you kind of join 'em in some ways."

Relationships set the agency apart from the Internet, he says. Plus, it can offer certain incentives and values that

cannot be received online.

Like a "Virtuoso" nod by *Condé Nast Traveler*, Lawton explains the significance: "Out of 35,000 agencies, they list the top 100. Seventy of those are Virtuoso." This credential means extra amenities to those who book a trip through the agency. Furthermore, Virtuoso status gives Geraci agents the contacts needed to set up special private tours via onsite partners throughout the world.

As a full-service agency, Geraci provides services such as making hotel and car reservations, and booking cruises, tours, hiking trips, and even private jet tours.

8595 College Parkway, Ft. Myers, 239/433-5222; [www.geracitravel.com](http://www.geracitravel.com)

**Island Park Travel's** services run the gamut, from simple airline reservations to complex international bookings. Although Island Park Travel books cruises and tours as well as hotels and car rentals, world travel is a forte of owner Marika Luthringer. A resident of Sanibel since 1982, she is a native of Estonia and was a resident of Germany.

Island Park also offers services geared toward Catholic travelers. "We feature trips for Catholics to do pilgrimages to sites such as Lourdes in France and the Vatican," Luthringer says. Her most popular local tour bookings tend to be to national parks, with quite a few outings to Western states, she says. 16520 Tamiami Trail, Suite 215, Ft. Myers; 239/433-1660; fax 239/433-4844

If you were wondering where **Around the World Travel** went after twenty years on Sanibel, owner Nancy Intogna moved the office to Ft. Myers. Business hasn't been hurt in the least by the move, however.

Cruise bookings provide the biggest piece of her business, with an even percentage of Caribbean and worldwide trips and quite a few weekend cruises, as well.

Her clients also use the agency to assist in planning trips abroad. Intogna books both pre-existing tours and independent travel. "We'll design a trip for people who want to set up their own itineraries. It's almost like a tour but you're seeing what you want and at your own pace." This includes trips with multiple airline tickets, hotel reservations, tours, maps, a list of attractions, and more.

"We have clientele who would never book with a computer. People that go to Orbitz aren't looking for the type of vacation that we can provide them," Intogna says. "Our niche is more upscale travel.

Plus, our rates are lower." 15880 Summerlin Road, Summerlin Crossings, Ft. Myers; 239/472-1222 or 800/940-6468; fax 239/466-9589

Travel consultant Mary Wilcox states, "At this point we do the airlines as a service, but it's not like it used to be in the old days, where most of the business was airlines." Her company, **Beach Travel Agency**, has to charge a fee because airlines no longer pay commission. With ports just a simple drive away, the cruise aspect of the Southwest Florida travel business is booming. Beach Travel also focuses on booking tours, hotels, car rentals, and occasionally Amtrak reservations.

Locally, the agency handles some one- to three-day bus tours around the state. "Those are mainly for people who come down here for vacation," Wilcox explains. "We book a lot of Disney tours, too."

She adds, "For cruises and tours it's so much better to come to a travel agency. We can anticipate what problems could

arise." Wilcox says, "People usually find out about us from calls and walk-ins. We build personal relationships with people." 7205 Estero Boulevard, Suite 703, Ft. Myers Beach, 239/463-5744, 800/652-4995

Services offered by **Boca Grande Travel Inc.** include everything from airline, cruise, and hotel reservations to theater packages and limousine rentals. "Whatever anybody needs," offers manager Shari Christenson. Locally owned and operated for thirteen years, Boca Grande Travel provides clients with personalized and experienced service, something not found on the Internet, she says. Serving mostly local residents, the company does a lot of airline bookings to domestic destinations and a smaller percentage to Europe, including Ireland, France, Italy, and Germany. 380 East Railroad Ave., Boca Grande; 941/964-0200; fax 941/964-2107; e-mail shari.bocagrandetravel@wspan.com

— Julie Clay

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